A WORD OF FRIENDLY REPROOF AND INSTRUCTION

To thoſe who *ſeldom* go to Church.

BY A COUNTRY CLERGYMAN:
For the Uſe of his Pariſhioners.

You ſay you hope to be ſaved; and you profeſs yourſelf a member of the church of England.

I earneſtly beſeech you, then, as you value that hope and profeſſion, to read the following pages with ſerious attention; and, if you are at the head of a family, to prevail upon your children, ſervants, and day-labourers, to hear them read over, if it be but once.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

A WORD
OF
FRIENDLY REPROOF, &c.

DEARLY BELOVED,

ON reckoning up the number of families who profeſs themſelves members of the church of England, and comparing them with thoſe who uſually attend its public ſervice; the very great diſproportion ſtrikes me with concern.

Public worſhip is ſo evidently both of divine and human inſtitu-

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tion, that you cannot be a good Subject, any more than a Chriſtian, while you continue to attend it but ſeldom; for, while you are ſetting the laws of heaven at defiance, you are treating the laws of your country with the ſame contempt. But I addreſs you as a miniſter, not as a magiſtrate; and therefore only drop this hint by the bye.

I ſhall now lay before you ſome paſſages from the ſcriptures, which, take but candor and attention to conſider them, will clearly convince you of the ſtrong obligations you are under, of conſtant attendance upon public worſhip.

You may read in the Old Teſtament, and particularly in the books of Deuteronomy [a] and Joſhua [b], how

[a] Deut. xxix. 10. xxxi. 11, 12.
[b] Joſh. viii. 34, 35.

punctually

punctually all the congregation of Iſrael attended upon the public reading of the law. The women and the little ones heard all the law from the mouths of Moſes and Joſhua, and after their deceaſe from perſons duly appointed to read it. In the more advanced age of the church, when David was king over Iſrael, public worſhip was held in the ſame high repute. Obſerve how feelingly David ſpeaks of having gone with the multitude to the houſe of God: "[c] Like as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, ſo longeth my ſoul after thee, O God: my ſoul is athirſt for God, yea even for the living God: when ſhall I come to appear before the preſence of God? My tears have been my meat day and night,

[c] Pſal. xlii. 5.

while they daily ſay unto me, Where is now thy God? Now, when I think thereupon, I pour out my heart by myſelf; for I went with the multitude, and brought them forth into the houſe of God, in the voice of praiſe and thankſgiving, among ſuch as keep holy-day."

Hear too part of the 48th Pſalm; where, under the name of Sion, you are to underſtand the chief place of God's public worſhip. " [d] Great is the Lord, and highly to be praiſed, in the city of our God, even upon his holy hill; the hill of Sion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth." And again, " We wait for thy loving kindneſs, O God, in the midſt of thy temple." In the 84th Pſalm, the ſacred penman expreſſes

[d] Pſal. xlviii. 2.

his

his deſire to go up unto the houſe of the Lord with ſuch warmth, that, unleſs your heart is cold indeed, you muſt feel it in ſome degree your-ſelf.

" [e] O how amiable are thy dwellings, O Lord of hoſts! my ſoul hath a deſire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord: my heart and my fleſh rejoice in the living God. Yea, the ſparrow hath found her an houſe, and the ſwallow a neſt where ſhe may lay her young; even thy altars, O Lord of hoſts, my king, and my God! Bleſſed are they that dwell in thy houſe: they will be always praiſing thee: they will go from ſtrength to ſtrength; and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion. One

[e] Pſal. lxxx. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11.

day

day in thy courts is better than a thouſand: I had rather be a door-keeper in in the houſe of my God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodlineſs."

The 95th Pſalm, which we always read in the morning ſervice, is ſweetly adapted to public worſhip: " O come let us ſing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the ſtrength of our ſalvation; let us come before his preſence with thankſgiving, and ſhew ourſelves glad in him with pſalms: for the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. O come let us worſhip and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our maker."

From all theſe paſſages we may plainly conclude, that divine bleſſings are principally to be expected

in the aſſemblings at God's houſe; that the feet of the thankful delight to tread the courts thereof; and that he has no ſpiritual affection, any more than gratitude, glowing in his breaſt, who cannot heartily take up his word, and ſay, "I was glad when they ſaid unto me, We we will go into the houſe of the Lord."

Before I finiſh the references to the Old Teſtament worſhip, let me requeſt of you to read over the ſixth chapter of the ſecond book of Chronicles, containing Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple. No doubt but you have heard of Solomon's temple, its grandeur and magnificence; yet the worſhip there celebrated, yea, though aſſiſted with all that vaſt grandeur, was not to be compared with the worſhip

ſhip which you uſually neglect; for if the preaching of the law, and the ſetting forth of its types and ceremonies, was glorious; how much rather does the Chriſtian worſhip, and the preaching of Chriſt (to whom the law with the types and ceremonies pointed) exceed in glory! And if a Jew was inexcuſable for not attending the ordinances of the law; what muſt become of you, profeſſing yourſelf a Chriſtian, for generally neglecting the ordinances of the Goſpel?

Your guilt appears ſtrong, from what has been already obſerved from the Old Teſtament; but it will be ſeen much ſtronger, upon conſidering the inſtitutions of Chriſt in the New. For his appointment of a ſettled regular ſucceſſion of miniſters, till his coming a ſecond time to judge

the

the world, determines your guilt as clearly as every thing elſe that can be urged. The appointment of miniſters (not to mention other parts of their office) implies the gathering together of hearers; and as there is no hearing without preaching, ſo there can be no occaſion for preaching without hearing. The very mention of the duty on our ſide, ſets the guilt of neglect in duty on yours in the ſtrongeſt light. Suppoſe a miniſter careleſs and indifferent to the religious concerns of the people committed to his charge — you perceive the ſinfulneſs of ſuch a character, without my referring you to thoſe portions of ſcripture which denounce woe upon unfaithful ſhepherds. But think you that the people who are careleſs and negligent in their

attendance upon the miniſter can be guiltleſs? Did you ever conſider how Jeſus Chriſt reſents the conduct of thoſe who neglect his miniſters, that is, (at leaſt in one ſenſe of the word) who neglect to hear them? You may ſee in the tenth chapter of Luke, verſe 16, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me; and he that deſpiſeth me, deſpiſeth him that ſent me." This paſſage is very applicable on the preſent occaſion: for are not we, the miniſters of the Goſpel, in the place of thoſe diſciples to whom our Lord ſpeaks? Do we not preach to you in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, and as put in authority by him? "He that heareth you, heareth me, ſays our Lord; and he that deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me."

"Oh!

"Oh! but (ſay you) I do not mean to deſpiſe Chriſt, by not coming to church ſo often as I ſhould." This may not be your expreſs intention: nevertheleſs, the guilt of that great ſin lies at your door as often as you are abſent from public worſhip without a real cauſe. What is *deſpiſing*, in the verſe above, but not hearing; or, in other words, what is *deſpiſing*, but thinking ſo meanly of our preaching, or ſo highly of ſome other object, as to be detained by that object from due attendance upon the Goſpel ordinances?

As long as we preach the Goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity, you are bound to give diligent heed to our preaching: and if you treat any part of our office with ſlight and contempt, as you may be ſaid to do in an eſpecial manner by

not coming to hear us — Know this for a truth, and tremble at the thought of continuing in the practice, Chriſt takes the affront as offered to God the Father and Himſelf. "He that deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me; and he that deſpiſeth me, deſpiſeth him that ſent me."

Several of you cannot read; and have hardly any opportunity of hearing the word of God, but from the miniſter: and dare you trifle with the opportunity?

Some plead, that if they remain ignorant of duty, they ſhall not be puniſhed for leaving it undone— but let this undeniable maxim ſink deep into the ears of all ſuch ſelf-deceivers, "that men are always anſwerable for the omiſſion of duties which they had an opportunity of knowing;

knowing; and that wilful ignorance is direct and ſtudied diſobedience."

Others can read, and pretend to know their duty as well as the miniſter can teach them (as if hearing a ſermon was the whole of coming to church, where prayer and praiſe form the major part of the ſervice): but I will not ſcruple to affirm, that ſuch perſons, however they may know their duty, are evidently by this very neglect far, very far, from practiſing it, and conſequently ſtand in need of being reminded thereof by the miniſter as much as any who come to hear him.

They are apt to ſay too, that they can read the Scriptures at home; but I doubt whether thoſe who have no heart to come to church, have any more to read the Scriptures

at

at home; I mean with ſincerity and humility—for I aſk—and appeal to common ſenſe for the anſwer—can you be ſincerely and humbly ſearching the will of God in the Bible, while you are living in the habitual neglect of attending public worſhip, which is a duty as clear from Scripture as though it was found written there in ſo many words, " Go conſtantly with reverence to the place appointed for public worſhip."

It is my intention to ſhew you that you are in general inexcuſable for not coming regularly to church; and therefore I ſhall conſider the uſual reaſons given for ſtaying away, and expoſe the deceitfulneſs of ſuch of them as deſerve it.

" You are ſick, and cannot come;
" or you are waiting upon thoſe that
" are,

" are, or upon young children, " neither of which claſs of perſons " ſhould be left alone." Sickneſs is a real hindrance; and attendance upon others under ſuch circumſtances, or helpleſs children, is the mercy which undoubtedly takes place of ſacrifice; but, as you have an immortal ſoul, which muſt be nouriſhed and ſerved as well as your body, ſuffer me to aſk (it being a caſe of great importance) whether you are not ſometimes more indulgent to your bodily complaints, and more fearful of getting harm by coming to church, than need be? and whether you could not contrive to be aſſiſtant one to another, in taking care by turns of your children during the hours of public worſhip? Where inclination is wanting to a duty, we are all of us too ſoon furniſhed

niſhed with excuſes for not fulfilling it.

But what ſhall we ſay to the more common excuſes; the weakneſs of which immediately appears upon being held up to the light of God's word? Such as the following:— "That you have not been at church "ſo long, that you ſhould be *par-* "*ticular* were you to be ſeen there "now, and are therefore aſhamed "to go;"—or, "that you are ſo "meanly cloathed, that your neigh- "bours would laugh at you, or "frown upon you; or that you are "as good as ſeveral that do attend, "who are no better for it; and that "therefore you may as well ſtay "away."

As to the firſt excuſe — if you have kept away from church *ſo*

long, juſt ſo long have you been a deſpiſer of God's ordinances: and which is beſt, continuing in this ſin, or breaking it off by making one of the congregation next Lord's-day?

As to mean cloathing, if, through calamities of any kind, or the demands of a large family, you have no other to put on; take my advice: Go to church; let him who dares, laugh or frown—God's face will be againſt that man in return, when his calamity cometh: he muſt want the bowels of a man, much more of a Chriſtian, who can make ſport of your poverty. And farther let me tell you; your ſhame is of a falſe ſort. Providence (in a ſenſe) has cloathed you as you are cloathed: and ought you to be aſhamed of his

appointment? But if through extravagance you are thus reduced, or becauſe when you had money you would in ſome ſhape or other add fuel to the flame of your luſts; take ſhame to yourſelf, as the juſt conſequence of your folly. You are guilty of bringing yourſelf into ſuch circumſtances as will not permit you to appear upon an equal footing with your neighbours. Nevertheleſs, I would adviſe you to go up to church, and to own your folly to any who ſeem to remark you; and, by an ingenuous confeſſion of it, you may probably obtain that charitable aſſiſtance, which otherwiſe would not have been called out into exerciſe. As to the laſt excuſe, " That you are as good as ſeveral that do attend, who are no better

for

for it, and that therefore you may as well ſtay away:" it is ſo inconſiſtent a method of reaſoning, that you will laugh at it yourſelves, if applied on any other occaſion. "Some people take food; but it paſſes through them undigeſted, and without affording proper nouriſhment; others therefore will eat no food at all:" or, "ſome followed our Lord when he was upon earth; but it appeared by their conduct, that they only followed him for the loaves and fiſhes; others therefore refuſed to follow him at all." How do you like the reaſoning in theſe two inſtances? is it not inconſiſtent in the higheſt degree?

But you act upon it, as often as you keep from church becauſe ſeveral

who go there are no better for going, and becauſe you are as good as you think them to be.

But this excuſe is in one reſpect worſe than any other; for it is a ſign of much cenſoriouſneſs and uncharitableneſs. What have you to do with other people? Your buſineſs is, to make your own calling and election ſure. They are anſwerable for abuſing the means of grace; and you are left without excuſe for neglecting them. Again, if you ſuppoſe that you are to be ſaved becauſe you are as good as ſome, and better than others, of your neighbours, you are yet ſtrangers to the firſt principles of Chriſtianity—you are yet utterly ignorant of the ſcheme of ſalvation laid down in the Bible, to which I heartily refer you,

to

to know "what you muſt do to be ſaved," and not to the deluſive ſtandard of other peoples characters.

There are others, who have no kind of excuſe for not coming, or coming ſo *ſeldom*; but, being led away by their luſts to public houſes, places of entertainment, or detained elſewhere by unſeaſonable viſits, are heaping upon themſelves indignation, from the gracious, but deſpiſed, Inſtitutor of public ordinances.

I omit inſiſting upon the complicated guilt of neglecting them, both as it includes the breaking of the Sabbath, and the ſetting a bad example; which, if you are at the head of a family, may have the worſt conſequences: for all which,

you

you are in a great meaſure anſwerable. I have not inſiſted upon the danger of that fatal ignorance which muſt remain in the underſtandings of thoſe who, deſtitute of the helps of a good education, know, and ordinarily can know, but little of religious truths, but what they learn from their miniſters. As to the ſtale pretence of not being able to get ready in time for church, on account of buſineſs; take care that you have to plead *neceſſary buſineſs*, in the faithful acceptation of the words: for it is not to be called neceſſary, if it could have been done on Saturday, or might be deferred till Monday. Breaking in upon Sunday mornings, by late returns from marketing, or traffick of any ſort; or breaking in, upon the ſame account,

account, on any part of the Sunday afternoon, is nine times in ten the fact, with thoſe who prefer the temple of Mammon before the temple of the living God.

I will conclude what I have to offer upon this head, with this ſolemn warning: You may deceive your miniſter; you may deceive yourſelves: but you cannot deceive the Searcher of hearts. Look well to it, therefore, that your excuſe for not coming to church be ſuch as you need not bluſh to offer before the judgement-ſeat of God. This conſideration may ſerve as a general touchſtone, to prove *every ſort* of excuſe that can be urged; an anſwer to all of which, ariſing from a variety of circumſtances according to

the difference of ſtation in life, cannot be expected to appear in the compaſs of this tract.

I am thoroughly aware, that multitudes attend church regularly, without attaining the end. I am ſorry to have reaſon alſo to add, that the reliance upon forms and mere attendance is the general miſtake of the age and day in which we live. Notwithſtanding all this, I am bound to maintain it as a truth; that, though a perſon profeſſing Chriſtianity may attend church as punctually as the bell tolls, and not be a Chriſtian at laſt; it is impoſſible that *he* ſhould be a Chriſtian, who, being a profeſſed member of our church, frequently (without juſt cauſe) neglects it.

To

To ſuch an one alone I humbly offer this word of friendly reproof and inſtruction; it being far from my deſign to reflect on the conſcientious diſſenter, of any denomination.

Thus have I plainly ſhewn the guilty ſtate of thoſe who neglect attendance upon publick worſhip. The number of the guilty protects me from the charge of aiming at any particular perſons in what I have advanced.

I addreſs you in print, becauſe the houſes where I propoſe to have this left are too many to admit of it in writing, which moreover you would few of you make out ſo readily. I might have applied to you perſonally from houſe to houſe; but it would have been long before

I could have found you ſo eaſily as this will, and longer ſtill before an opportunity would have preſented itſelf of entering ſo fully upon the ſubject.

Beſides, the buſineſs of the converſation would probably die with the ſound of my voice. It is poſſible indeed for you to pay as tranſient a regard to this paper, as to a converſation upon the ſame ſubject: but this method of application entirely ſtrips you of every plea. You might forget, or pretend to forget, arguments once urged: but you cannot pretend to forget any argument contained herein; for this remains with you. I pray God, it may not witneſs againſt you: but, however that may be, my

conſcience

conſcience is now entirely cleared; and your blood, if you perſevere in your neglect, is upon yourſelves.

If this ſhould fall into the hands of any ſincere Chriſtians; let them join their prayers with mine, that it may be bleſſed to thoſe for whoſe uſe it was honeſtly intended, by their affectionate miniſter,

&c, &c.

F I N I S.

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